



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad addressing the South African parliament on Thursday on increased economic cooperation between Southeast Asia and southern Africa. — AFP/UNB photo

Parliament backs Sonia's criticism of govt

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: The Indian parliament weighed in to support the widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi today, backing her criticism of the slow pace of the investigation into the assassination of her husband, reports Reuter.

"Sonia Gandhi's charges are correct. This is a deliberate delay," leftist opposition leader Ram Vlas Paswan told reporters in Lok Sabha, or lower house, after an impromptu debate sparked by her speech in her husband's old constituency of Amethi on Thursday.

The speech, the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi's first in Hindi at a political gathering, was seen as an attack on Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and sent the already embattled ruling Congress Party into a further bout of soul searching.

Anxious not to offend the head of the family that has

led the party, and India, for most of its post-independence history, Rao loyalists mostly kept a stony silence.

But the opportunity was too good to miss for breakaway Congress leader Arjun Singh.

He raised the issue in parliament, suggesting the House share Sonia Gandhi's "anguish" at the slow pace of the probe into the killing of her husband by a Tamil suicide bomber in May 1991.

Commerce Minister P Chidambaram, assigned by Rao to look after the progress of the investigation, assured parliament that much progress had been made and the guilty would be punished "as early as possible."

The Lok Sabha Speaker, Rao loyalist Shivraj Patil, stressed the need for speedier action in the case and said the House shared Sonia Gandhi's grief.

The Amethi speech marked a major step for

Sonia Gandhi, who has become increasingly involved behind the scenes in Congress politics this year as a splitter group led by Singh and ND Tiwari broke away from Rao's leadership.

"Congress politics has entered a crucial phase with the stage being set for a war of nerves between Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao," The Pioneer newspaper said.

"A realignment of forces within the Congress cannot be ruled out," it said. "If Sonia Gandhi decides to embarrass Rao by trying to politicise the issue of the slow progress of the probe."

Sonia Gandhi has been tilting more and more towards the breakaway Congress group, but the retains the loyalty of many of the party's fence-sitters who are becoming increasingly anxious about their fate in general elections, which the govern-

ment has said it will call before April.

Congress, which has suffered reverses in a string of state elections over the past year, could face a major drubbing in the general elections with many of its current legislators losing their seats.

Especially uncomfortable are the group of "Rajiv loyalists" in Congress who have sided with Rao against Tiwari and Singh but who maintain that their most important commitment is to the principles held by Rajiv Gandhi.

Sonia Gandhi's remark in her speech that the values and principles to which her husband, his mother, Indira, and his grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru dedicated their lives "are now being put to the test," sent a clear signal to Rajiv loyalists.

"Something has to be done now," the Asian Age quoted a leading member of the group as saying.

Myanmar troops kill 30 Khun Sa men in clashes

BANGKOK, Aug 25: At least 30 guerrillas from the army of Myanmar's opium warlord Khun Sa have been killed in clashes as government troops advance into his heartland in northeastern Myanmar's Shan state, rebel sources said today, reports Reuter.

Myanmar forces supported by fighters from Khun Sa's main opium-trade rivals from the Wa ethnic minority have captured a string of rebel outposts in sporadic fighting over the past two weeks, the sources said.

Casualties on the government side were not known.

Wa leaders rejected an appeal from Khun Sa for them not to support Myanmar government troops in attacking him, the sources said.

"The Wa regional commander told us a few days ago that they have agreed with the Burmese to capture our positions within two weeks," and official in Khun Sa's rebel organisation army told

Reuters.

He also warned us to withdraw from our positions to minimise the loss of life," the official said.

Myanmar's military government has vowed to crush Khun Sa and his guerrilla force.

The Wa fighters, who were previously the rank and file of the Communist Party of Myanmar's armed wing, are Khun Sa's traditional opium-trade rivals.

The Wa force signed a ceasefire with Myanmar's military government in 1989 and has since increased production of opium, and its refined form, heroin, from the Wa zone in northern Shan state. Thai narcotics suppression officials say.

Khun Sa suffered a serious set back earlier this year when several thousand of his troops, led by young Shan nationalists, broke away from his organisation saying Khun Sa was neglecting their political objectives.

BRIEFLY

China expels 2 HK journalists: China expelled two Hong Kong journalists Friday, accusing them of illegally collecting military secrets in the south-east province of Fujian. Xinhua news agency reported. AFP says from Beijing.

Gu Yingyan and Xie Mingzhaung, journalists with Hong Kong's next magazine, were expelled after admitting under interrogation to having been sent by their editor-in-chief, Zhang Jianghong, to obtain information and take photographs of military manoeuvres in coastal areas of Fujian.

Israeli troops kill 2 Hamas men: Israeli undercover troops killed two wanted Muslim militants in a shootout on Friday and bulldozed their safehouse in the West Bank town of Hebron. AP reports from Hebron.

The raid was part of Israel's intensifying battle against the Muslim militant Hamas group, which has claimed responsibility for two bus bombings that killed 12 people over the past month.

87 kg of heroin seized in Turkey: Police seized 87 kilograms (190 pounds) of heroin Friday hidden aboard a passenger bus headed for Istanbul, the Anatolia news agency said, AP reports from Van, Turkey.

The heroin was worth an estimated dlr 1.9 million, Anatolia said.

Ramos pardons 62 Chinese: President Fidel Ramos Friday pardoned 62 Chinese fishermen who have been jailed for six months in the Philippines for poaching in the disputed Spratly islands, but said four of them will remain in jail on related charges. AFP reports from Manila.

"I am granting absolute pardon to the Chinese fishermen who were convicted of malicious mischief by the regional trial court of Puerto Princesa," Ramos said in a statement.

Japanese Princess Setsuko dies: Princess Setsuko, an aunt of Japanese Emperor Akihito, died in Friday morning, the Imperial Household agency said. She was 85, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The cause of her death is not immediately known. An agency spokesman said earlier Friday that the princess, who had been hospitalised for slight fevers and weak appetite since July, had fallen into a coma Thursday evening.

Ebola outbreak ends in Zaire: The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared on Thursday that an outbreak in Zaire of the deadly ebola disease was officially over after killing 244 of its 315 known victims. Reuter reports from Geneva.

The United Nations health agency said 42 days, the equivalent of two maximum incubation periods, had passed without any new reported cases.

Cali leader charged with murder: A jailed leader of the Cali drug cartel who is suspected of killing dozens of people has been formally charged with murder, authorities said Thursday. AP reports from Bogota.

Ivan Urdinola is accused in the 1991 torture and killing of a former army lieutenant, Ricardo Petersson, whose body was tossed into a river near the southwestern city of Cali.

Yeltsin names security adviser: Russian President Boris Yeltsin has named a senior security adviser Oleg Lobov as his new special representative in Chechnya, a Russian lawmaker told the Russian news agency Interfax Thursday. AFP reports from Moscow.

Lobov, 57, has been an ally of Yeltsin for 30 years, has acted as a troubleshooter for Yeltsin in the past and is considered a hard liner in the government.

Protest against PLO-Israel talks: Several thousand right-wing protesters opposed to Israel's peace talks with the PLO clashed with police during demonstrations in Jerusalem on Thursday. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Police used water cannon to disperse protesters outside the official residence of President Ezer Weizman and clubbed demonstrators who blocked a road near Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's office, witnesses said.

Gunmen escape with \$ 820,000 after killing 4 in SA

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 25: Gunmen armed with assault rifles shot dead four people after ambushing a security vehicle carrying millions of rands on a highway close to the South African commercial capital Johannesburg, police said today, reports Reuter.

The police said the gunmen, travelling in three cars, escaped with more than three million rand (820,000 dollars) after ambushing the security vehicle and its escort car and spraying bullets at a taxi late on Thursday.

Two security guards and two women, who were in the taxi, were killed in the attack, which police described as a carefully-planned ambush.

Chechnya war costs Russia \$ 450 m

MOSCOW, Aug 25: War in Chechnya has cost the Russian defence ministry 1.9 trillion roubles (450 million US dollars) the ministry's budget department told the Itar-Tass News Agency Thursday, reports AFP.

A departmental head, said, "we don't have the means to pay salaries to soldiers or civilian staff."

Total defence ministry debt is 3.6 trillion roubles, the budget office said. The same office said at the beginning of August that the Russian army was in debt to the tune of 1.7 trillion roubles due to its actions in Chechnya.

Australia, Japan regret N-policies of China, France

CANBERRA, Aug 25: The Australian and Japanese governments jointly expressed regret at Chinese and French nuclear testing policies, reports Reuter.

Both sides expressed their regret that the Chinese government resumed the testing and that the French government has not yet withdrawn its decision to resume testing," Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hiroshi Hashimoto said after a meeting that included the two country's foreign ministers.

Australia and Japan have both condemned China's detonation of a nuclear device on August 17 and France's June announcement that it would resume nuclear tests in the South Pacific next month.

China ends naval exercise

BEIJING, Aug 25: China announced today it had ended a series of naval manoeuvres off the Taiwanese coast that had triggered political unease and a stock-market plunge in Taipei, reports AFP.

The official news agency Xinhua, quoting an announcement by the Ministry of Communications, said the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had ended guided missile and artillery firing exercises in the east China sea.

Shipping and air traffic could resume normal operations as from midnight tonight, it said.

The 10-day manoeuvres, which took place in an area some 150 kilometres (90 miles) off northwest Taiwan had followed a previous missile exercise in the same location between July 20-26.



Sonia Gandhi and daughter Priyanka (L) wave to the cheering crowd on Thursday in Amethi during Sonia's first ever political speech. — AFP/UNB photo

Iraq denies bid to attack Kuwait, Saudi Arabia

NICOSIA, Cyprus, Aug 25: The Iraqi leadership has dismissed allegations it planned new attacks on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, claiming that a leading defector was alone in making these suggestions, reports AP.

The denial, aired by the state-run Iraqi television late Thursday, was Iraq's first reaction to a critical speech by King Hussein of Jordan in which he threw his support behind the defector, Lt. Gen. Hussein Kamel al-Majid, in a departure from his traditional alliance with Baghdad.

Iraqi television broadcast an audio recording of what it

said was al-Majid addressing a leadership meeting on October 10, 1994, when Iraqi military movements near the Kuwait border sparked a massive buildup of US and allied forces in the Gulf.

The recorded voice said: "The problem is not Kuwait alone. The eastern region of Saudi Arabia is the core of the problem... We have the ability, our people are prepared, our army is prepared, and our capabilities are ready. Let us not allow our enemies to remain strong..."

The full text of the comments, released Friday by the state-run Iraqi News Agency,

made no suggestion of military action.

However, an unidentified commentator made that interpretation during the broadcast, saying: "The reality is that Hussein Kamel was the only member of the Iraqi leadership who was calling for... the occupation of Kuwait and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia."

The official Iraqi News Agency said Thursday that Saddam, in his capacity as leader of the ruling Arab Baath Socialist Party, has stripped al-Majid and "the rest of the traitors" of their party ranks.



Hollywood star Jean-Claude van Varenberg alias Jean-Claude van Damme arrives with his second wife Darcy Lapier, to be witness of his sister's wedding Veronique van Varenberg with Gil van Pelt on Thursday at the Karreveld Castle in Brussels. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Fraud butcher

COLOMBO: A butcher who killed his pet dog and palmed off the meat as lamb chops is being held in jail, police said Friday, reports AP.

The butcher, Maputanage Chandradasa, bludgeoned the dog, then sold the meat to six customers for 100 rupees (2 dollars) per kilogram (1 dollar a pound), police said. Sri Lankans do not eat dog meat.

The customers reported no illness, but became suspicious when they spotted the butcher's only lamb grazing in his garden at Panaluwa, 30 kilometres (18 miles) east of the capital, Colombo.

Police later found some of the dog's remains in a well and arrested the butcher on charges of fraud. They were considering bringing other charges, an official said.

A judge on Thursday ordered Chandradasa to be held in jail until September, and asked for a report if dog meat was harmful to humans.

Too busy Arafat

BONN: Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, has said in an interview published Thursday he has only seen his daughter for ten minutes since her birth a month ago, reports AFP.

"Unfortunately, I have only been able to see my daughter for ten minutes in Paris, because my workload has been too heavy," he told the German newspaper Bild.

"I hope that peace will soon be confirmed so that I can have more time with my daughter and my family," he said, speaking from Gaza. Arafat's daughter, Zahwa, was born on July 24 in Paris. He visited her on July 27.



Why Aussies on rush for Angeles City?

MANILA: More than a third of the 70,000 Australians who visit the Philippines each year come here as members of sex tours, a Philippine senator said Friday, reports AP.

Sen Ernesto Herrera, quoting police intelligence reports, said about 25,000 Australian men go to the country each year for sex with prostitutes. Some of these men are also involved in sexual exploitation of Filipino children, he added.

But he added other foreigners, including Britons, Germans, Japanese and Belgians, have been reported to have come here because of promotional campaigns by sex tour operators. He did not give a figure for the other nationalities involved in sex tours.

In Canberra, Aid Minister Gordon Bilney announced Thursday that Australian Federal Police will travel to the Philippines later this year to help local authorities crack down on sex crimes.

Bilney said three officers will train Filipino law enforcers on surveillance techniques and investigation of sexual offenses.

Police will also conduct surveillance training with Philippines narcotics police, he said.

The announcement of the 57,000 dlr (77,000 Australian dollars) programme followed this week's visit to Australia by Philippine President Fidel Ramos. Ramos arrived in the country Wednesday after an eight-day visit to New Zealand and Australia.

Bilney said the sexual offenses course would involve 25 Philippine policemen, while 25 narcotics officers would take part in the second course.

Australians have been linked to the Philippines sex industry, particularly in the Angeles City area north of Manila.

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Wu's release widens chance of Hillary's joining women confce

WASHINGTON, Aug 25: The surprise expulsion of human rights activist Harry Wu from China has greatly increased the likelihood that First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will attend an international women's conference in Beijing next month, reports AP.

Her presence would heighten interest in the conference, which is set for September 4-15 and is expected to draw some 40,000 people from all over the world. The US agenda for the meeting will focus on such topics as violence against women and equal access to health care, education and political and economic power.

About 20 per cent of the delegates to the official meeting and the related conference of non-government organisations will be from the United States.

The White House continued to answer cautiously when it came to questions about Mrs. Clinton's plans for the conference.

"The decision is still under consideration," said spokeswoman Ginny Terzano, who was with the vacationing Clintons in Jackson, Wyoming.

In reaction to Wu's release, White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry said:

"The President welcomes the Chinese government's decision and is pleased that Mr. Wu will be reunited with his family and friends."

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, the frontrunning 1996 Republican presidential contender, said the "good news" should not be allowed to obscure continuing human rights violations in China. He said Clinton should still refuse to allow a US delegation to attend the conference

set for September 4-15.

"Wu's imprisonment was not only a violation of this fundamental rights, but a slap in the face of the United States," Dole said in a statement.

Dole and other Republican congressional leaders have urged Hillary Clinton not to attend, as a protest of China's human rights abuses and of its arrest and trial of Wu, a Chinese American.

Some advocacy organisations also suggested that the whole US delegation should boycott the meeting.

But UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright, who is leading the US delegation to the conference, argued Thursday that it would be illogical to boycott a human rights conference in the name of human rights.

"Open discussion about the status of women makes a difference not only in China

but everywhere, for countries in which women have a fair share of power tend to be more stable, prosperous and just than those in which women are marginalised and repressed," she said.

"Nor should we underestimate the impact a conference such as this can have on the host country itself. Conference preparations have heightened awareness within China of women's issues. There is a public discussion of previously taboo subjects, including violence against women."

Albright outlined the US agenda for the conference at a State Department briefing Thursday, just before word of Wu's expulsion.

"First, with respect to our goals, we want to promote and protect the human rights of women," she said. "We want to end violence against women. We want to expand

women's participation in political and economic decision-making. We want to assure equal access for women to education and health care throughout our lives. And we want to strengthen families through efforts to balance the work and family responsibilities of women and men."

Too often, and in too many places women are denied access to health care, education, credit and equality under the law. Women are being abused through coerced abortions and sterilizations, being sold into prostitution, having their genitals mutilated and suffering under official indifference to violence against them, she said.

Asked whether she would use the conference to criticise the Chinese for human rights abuses, she said: "Those of you who know me know I usually speak my mind, and that's what I in-

UK eases remission terms for jailed IRA rebels

BELFAST, Aug 25: Britain announced easier remission terms for jailed Northern Ireland guerrillas today in a move to keep its year old peace initiative on track, reports Reuter.

Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew, said providing a year old guerrilla peace lasted, he would seek legislation making convicted guerrillas eligible for release after serving half their sentences instead of two thirds now.

The government would also study policing in Northern Ireland where the protestant dominated royal ulster constabulary has been accused of heavy handedness by the minority catholic population.

The moves were seen as concessions to Sinn Fein political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Vatican to send delegation

VATICAN CITY, Aug 25: Pope John Paul, in an unprecedented move, has chosen a delegation composed mainly of women to represent the Vatican at next month's UN women's conference in Beijing, the Holy See announced today, reports Reuter.

The 22-strong group of which 14 are women, will be headed by Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon. Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls said the delegation would make no concessions on abortion.